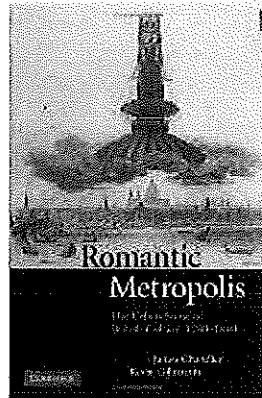




James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Eds.), *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 291, hardback, ISBN: 9780521839013, £56.00, \$96.00



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<1> London takes centre stage in this impressive collection of essays. It features in nine of the eleven chapters, while Edinburgh and Venice are the focus of the first and final chapters respectively. As a whole, *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* constitutes a significant contribution to Romantic studies, bringing together the work of leading scholars from the disciplines of English, history and art history and examining an array of cultural productions from 'poetry, fiction, drama, non-fiction, the visual arts, cultural sites, social spaces and historical movements' (p. 1). Such diversity and interdisciplinarity is one of the volume's major strengths. What knits these essays together is a concern to 'extend our understanding of Romanticism, not as a movement against the city, but as an aesthetic that developed along with it -- and contributed to -- the ascendancy of metropolitan life' (p. 19). In this general aim *Romantic Metropolis* does much to consolidate a growing body of scholarship that, since the 1980s, has sought a more nuanced understanding of Romanticism's negotiation of rural and urban sensibilities.

<2> Another major strength of the volume is its detailed and cogent introduction that seeks an adjustment to critical perceptions inherited from Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973). Rather than treating the Romantic synthesis of rural and urban experience (exemplified in Williams's reading of Blake's 'London') as exceptional, Chandler and Gilmartin see such a synthesis as characteristic of cultural production in the Romantic metropolis. More radically, they propose a revision of Walter Benjamin's claim for mid-19th century 'Paris as the paradigmatic center in the new metropolitan scheme of things -- as the place in which the new panoramic mode of representation emerged and as the site where Romantic cityscape displaces modern cityscape' (pp. 6-7). Here the editors set out to demonstrate that these events and occurrences took place in the London of an earlier Romantic period, an argument they conceptualise through a consideration of the urban art of the panorama, and specifically Thomas Girtin's 1802 panoramic painting of London, *Eidometropolis*, and Philippe Jacques De Loutherbourg's earlier spectacular scenic entertainment, *Eidophusikon*, exhibited in London in 1781. These two dramatic innovations provide the editors with a 'model and metaphor' with which to explore the 'complex layering and lighting of new metropolitan forms of representation' (p. 11). In the introduction's nuanced readings of Wordsworth's Westminster Bridge sonnet, Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Cobbett's *Rural Rides* that follows, this 'layering and lighting' -- the intricate overlaying patterns of urban and rural experience -- are deftly unfolded.

<3> The volume is sub-divided into four sections headed 'Metropolis, Nation, and Empire', 'Urban Radicalism and Reform', 'Metropolitan Spectacle' and 'The New Poetry of Urban Publicity'. Ian Duncan's essay, 'Edinburgh, capital of the nineteenth century', opens the first section with an examination of how the 'institutional establishment of "national culture" took place in Edinburgh'. Duncan explores the making of the city as a cultural and aesthetic capital via a survey of a range of discourses including the polemical interplay between the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, as well as, and most significantly, Walter Scott's potent social, literary and symbolic influence, what Duncan calls 'Scott's shadow' (p. 54). Jon Klancher's 'Discriminations, or Romantic cosmopolitanisms in London' examines the 'cultural distinctiveness of what the eighteenth century defined as cosmopolitanism' (p. 66). Taking writings by Mary Robinson, Cyrus Redding and William Hazlitt, Klancher explains how Enlightenment's confident cosmopolitan ideals disintegrated towards the end of the 18th century with the decline of the Republic of Letters, producing as a consequence a more cautious, less cohesive experience of cosmopolitanism that is characteristically Romantic.

<4> John Barrell's 'London and the London Corresponding Society' begins the second section with a historical analysis of the LCS as a phenomenon of the inner-city, exploring its geographical referents and examining how the society came to be perceived as 'monstrous' in its likeness to London, while at the same time a challenge to London in its demand for democracy. In Saree Makdisi's essay, 'Blake's metropolitan radicalism', a persuasive close reading of salient sections of Blake's *America* finds a distinction between the Lockean version of liberal democracy (based on the notion of 'Liberty' as reasoned self-regulation exercised by the unitary Individual) and a Blakean 'metropolitan radicalism' centred on the primacy of desire and on the transformative potential of the urban collective body. Following Makdisi, Frances Ferguson's 'Envy rising' interrogates the Romantic emergence of envy from Coleridge to Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* and the educational discourses of Bell, Lancaster and Bentham. In an insightful reading of Bentham, Ferguson shows how the 'monitorial system' enshrined an evaluative logic exemplifying the rationalisation of envy both in the classroom and in society at large.

<5> Part three, 'Metropolitan Spectacle', opens with Ann Bermingham's essay 'Urbanity and the spectacle of art'. Bermingham posits elitist aesthetic sensibilities, exemplified in Hazlitt's writings, against Rudolph Ackermann's commercially orientated promotion of art as 'national enterprise' and 'fashionable, urbane pastime' (p. 159). Examining why images of London figured so little in the work of leading Romantic artists, Bermingham convincingly demonstrates how this neglect 'lies precisely in the perception that the city was the site of commerce, the place where art was debased by a commercially fabricated and feminized taste' (p. 169). Through her exploration of Ackermann's vision of art as a social body, Bermingham retrieves a characteristically metropolitan Romantic art culture that she suggests has been historically neglected for the primary reason that it is Hazlitt's conception of the Individual Romantic genius that historically endures. In 'Mystagogues of Revolution: Cagliostro, Loutherboung and Romantic London', Iain McCalman offers a fascinating account of the flamboyant occultist, showman and Grand Cophite of Egyptian Masonry, Alessandro di Cagliostro. Observing Cagliostro's influence on Loutherboung, McCalman argues that Loutherboung's mythically symbolic art in turn influenced the later apocalyptic sublime paintings of John Martin and Joseph Turner. Finally in this section, Simon During's "'The temple lives": the Lyceum and Romantic show business' examines London's Lyceum theatre as the site of merging genres and emerging technologies. Tracing the Lyceum's history between 1770 and 1820, During argues that it is in 'rather nondescript places like this that major forms of contemporary culture -- technologized, commercialized culture -- found, literally, a *place* in the Romantic epoch' (p. 204).

<6> The final section of the volume interrogates the production and reproduction of Romantic cultures and ideologies. Peter J. Manning's 'Manufacturing the Romantic image: Hazlitt and Coleridge lecturing' is a nuanced exploration of the interplay between poetic high culture, urban entrepreneurship and the production of the image of the Romantic poet. Through the public lectures of Hazlitt and Coleridge, Manning examines the circumstances that made 'such knowledge a mark of cultural distinction in the city and at the same time reduces it to one among many interchangeable and banal novelties' (p. 228). In this context he considers the commodification of cultural knowledge, the tension between commercial profit and high culture, and the paradoxical situation in which the lecture hall vulgarises while it also shapes and sustains popular conceptions of the Romantic poet. Manning ends with a persuasive analysis of how Coleridge manipulates the lecture format so that 'the Romantic exotic reappears within the ambit of urban entrepreneurship' (p. 240).

<7> Anne Janowitz's compelling essay, 'The artifactual sublime: making London poetry', examines aesthetic expressions of 'austerity' and 'excess' in the Romantic sublime, tracing a particular strain of metropolitan poetics in which sublime 'austerity' (linked to the awesome experience of nature) gives way to an urban poetics of sublime 'excess', which itself is linked to the 'material excess of the production of goods and the production of identities to match those consumer goods' (p. 248). Against a radical poetic tradition of anti-urbanism, Janowitz posits this vibrant metropolitan sublime of excess as an alternative poetics of radical possibility, one that extols 'social' rather than 'individual' value and that shows how the 'limitlessness of the city becomes an opportunity for self-creation: a resource to declare freedom' (p. 255). The volume's final essay moves from London to focus on Venice. Celeste Langan's succinctly titled 'Venice' examines how the 'floating city', as an 'object of exchange between Napoleon and Metternich ... came to represent an entirely different model of "floating capital"' (p. 262). As such, Venice offered Byron a 'material and spatial equivalent of the work of art in the capitalist world system' which, Langan argues, he used to 'criticize myths of sovereignty' and to advance what Langan terms the 'relatively *non*-autonomous or *canalized* subject' (p. 268).

<8> These essays will be an invaluable resource for students and scholars seeking to explore the lateral avenues of Romantic cultures and ideologies. The collection's principal merits include its theoretical cohesion which it sustains over an impressive interdisciplinary breadth. *Romantic Metropolis* will draw readers from a number of academic disciplines, its cross-pollination of ideas undoubtedly providing a fruitful spur to further research.